

Matthew Chapter 19-20 – Jesus’ Judean Ministry – Part 4
Matthew 19:23-26 – The Rich Young Ruler – The Lesson

Introduction

Matthew is an evangelical book to Israel. The purpose of Matthew is:

- To demonstrate that Jesus is Christ (the Messiah)
- To reveal that Jesus is the Son of God – God in the flesh
- To introduce, offer, and prepare the Jews for the kingdom of heaven
- To prepare the Remnant of Israel to survive the Time of Jacob’s Trouble
- To write an account of the life and times of Jesus Christ
- To validate both this testimony and the testimony of all the apostles

Matthew 19:16 – Review

Matthew 19-23 is an account of Jesus’ final Judean ministry; He is in this region for 6-9 months, which will end in Jesus being arrested and crucified. During this time, Jesus, with the disciples, is going in and out of Jerusalem, healing the crowds and increasing the faith of the disciples while refuting challenges from the leadership sects in Jerusalem.

In the last two lessons, we have been discussing the rich, young ruler.

Lesson 1 – The Question – Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?

Normally, when we see “eternal life,” we automatically relate it to having a life from God that lasts forever and transcends time itself—to have His life in us. To the Greek speaker, this is not just a temporal idea but has a divine aspect—to have life, God’s life, God’s provided life. So, what did the Jew understand “God’s provided life” to mean?

We concluded that this young man was asking Jesus what one thing, one good thing, he could do at that moment or in the near future to secure his entry into the kingdom of heaven?

This is not a question about being born from above or saved from hell; rather, the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

For the Jew who was on the cusp of the Day of the Lord and the inauguration of the kingdom, he had to not only believe in Jesus, but he also had to have the qualities of someone worthy of the kingdom to enter into life (eternal life, the kingdom life) as a human.

Lesson 2 – The Response – Jesus does not answer the question directly; rather, He addresses the rich young ruler as to his actual need.

Jesus first addresses him asking, “Why do you (call me) ask me about what is good?” This redress by Jesus is saying to the young man, “Who do you say that I am?”

Keeping the commandments is not a statement of being perfect; rather, it is a statement that means to observe, to preserve, and do the Law of Moses. There is no indication that keeping the commandments means doing so perfectly. It does mean that there is respect and a perpetual observance of the commandments.

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Since the young man attested that he has kept the Law, Jesus addresses something that he lacks to enter the kingdom. It is important to realize that Jesus pointing out one thing he lacks is not the only thing he lacks. But Jesus hits him where it hurts. The lack of self-sacrifice is definitely an issue here. Based on this interaction, we can say what the rich young ruler lacked.

1. Lack of understanding of who Jesus is.
2. Lack of self-denial, true love of his neighbor.

Matthew 19:23-30 – The Lesson

After Jesus’ response, the rich young ruler went away grieving. Why? The love for money was not overcome by the desire to enter into the kingdom of heaven and have a great reward therein. Money is a tool; it is not the end; it is the means. The love for money indicates the love for affluence, abundance, comfort, and pleasure above the necessities of others and the truth of God.

This man, like most Jews, viewed prosperity as physical evidence of God’s favor. They viewed prosperity as a blessing of God, and to be poor was to be cursed by God. The culture of Israel was antithetical to that of the truth of the kingdom.

For the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven (physical entry), they had to have the character of the kingdom. This was difficult because it means leaving behind the security of their wealth.

The phrase *difficult for* is saying it is impossible. We see this in the reiteration, “...it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.” The largest animals familiar to the Jews were camels, and one of the smallest references is an eye of a sewing needle. Jesus relates the rich getting into the kingdom with a physical impossibility.

Why? Let’s read this again carefully and see why it is impossible for the rich to enter into the kingdom. It does not say why. We are left to try to answer this question through inference.

The typical answer is to say that the rich trust in riches instead of Christ. But where is faith in this passage? Where is “believe in Me” in this passage?

I believe that the reason that this is true, and if not for God it would be absolutely impossible for the rich in Israel to enter the kingdom, is because of the nature of the rich and poor in Israel. Exodus 22:21-23, 25-27; Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Proverbs 14:31; Ezekiel 16:48-50; Amos 2:6-8, 5:10-15; Micah 6:8-12

The problem in Israel was that the rich oppressed the poor. The rich were supposed to use their resources to help the poor. The rich young ruler violates one of the most basic truths in the Law. Jesus is confronting him with the most basic of concepts. How can you love your neighbor when all of your neighbors have nothing, and you live in luxury?

To get rich or stay rich, they were not keeping the commandments so as to survive the Day of Jacob’s Trouble and enter the kingdom of heaven.

The disciples, seeing this, were astonished. Who then can be saved?

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Saved is σωζω sōzō. Whenever we see this word, we must ask an important question. Saved from what? In the context, we have the “to what” — the kingdom. We have to know the Jewish prophetic timeline to understand the “from what.”

The “from what” is the Time of Jacob’s Trouble. There are certain characteristics that a person must have to survive that day.

1. Hold to the truth of God.
2. Believe in Jesus as Messiah.
3. Behavioral Rightness – Keeping the Law.
4. Not relying on man, nations, money, or any physical thing for survival
 - a. Isaiah 30:1-5
 - b. The man of lawlessness will make a covenant with Israel
 - c. Matthew 24:9-13
 - d. Matthew 24:15-18

Consequently, if a rich person were to make it through that time and be saved from Daniel’s 70th Week, it would be because he believed God that the riches of this world were to be used to provide for the needy.

If they were to understand and believe God to survive the day, they would know that for them to make it, they would have to divest their riches, give to the poor, and follow Jesus. How many during that time would do that?

Timeless Truth

How should we who are under grace, and not law, view riches?

1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19